



Simi Youth Baseball
COACH'S HANDBOOK

By Coach
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Chapter 4
Basic Fundamental Fielding & Throwing Techniques



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Chapter 4: Basic Fundamental Fielding and Throwing Techniques

Basic Ready Position:

Now that you have a well-designed practice plan, players are wearing adequate athletic protection, are appropriately uniformed, and have the correct glove, let's get going. Once on the field we must assure that each player is able to get into the right defensive ready position to maximize performance. The exact moment that the pitched ball crosses home plate, his/her body should be in a balanced position with the feet shoulder width apart, weight on the balls and insides of the feet, arms bent at a 90°, hands in front of the elbows and the knees in a flexed position. The infield ready position is demonstrated below in **Figure 1**. The knees must not be bent too much, whereas the fielder would have to raise up in order to move laterally. This takes time and can be the difference between getting to a batted ball or not. The entire concept of the correct ready position is to maximize efficient movement allowing the fielder to move as fast as possible with no wasted motion. If the player must move up, or down, in order to make lateral movements, we have wasted time and motion. This can mean the difference between an out and that moment of classic tragedy, the nearly out or the "we almost had em". Note that it is perfectly fine for outfielders to rest the hand and glove on the knees prior to each pitch.

Figure 1. Basic Infield Ready Position



Prior to the fielder making any physical move, he must be mentally prepared to field the baseball. Prior to the pitch the fielder should know the situation of the game, and should have played out each possible scenario that could occur at any particular moment. How many outs are there, are there runners on, what type of speed do the runner(s) and hitter have, is this an

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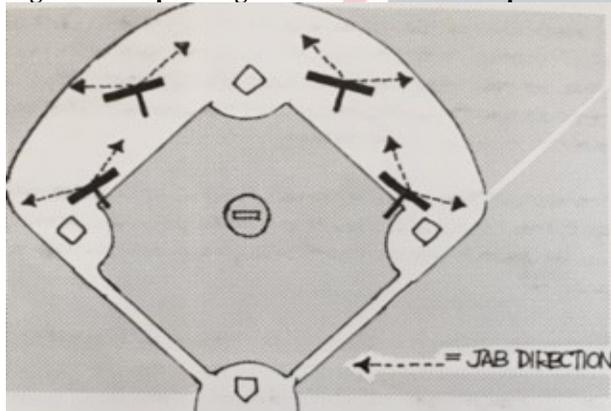
optimum type to put on an offensive play? Finally, the fielder should be in tune with his fellow teammates, most importantly the pitcher. Timing is essential when it comes to being in the correct position to field a batted ball, make or receive a throw, or perhaps act as a decoy. Obviously, the mental capabilities of players will advance with level. If you can prevent the little ones from building sand-castles while on defense; those in Pinto/Mustang to know and report the outs consistently, by the time we get to Bronco and Pony players should be able to play out potential scenarios prior to the pitch.

Once the ball is put in play, the fielders first step must be made without raising or lowering his/her hips. The fielder must stay low when running after a batted ball or to receive a throw, so when it comes time to field the ball there will be no wasted motion, or time lost. Essentially, the infielder will be able to get to another spot on the field more quickly and with the optimum amount of movement required to make the play. To teach the defensive player to be in a correct ready position, we instruct our fielders to either use a “creep” or “walk and hop” step as the pitcher delivers the baseball. By taking these small steps, the player learns to keep on the balls of the feet with his/her weight evenly distributed. The correct ready position allows the fielder to move in any direction the instant the ball is contacted by the hitter. “Time is outs” is a term we use to reinforce this routine. Once the correct ready position is established, through repetition, it becomes second nature and now your fielders are ready to pursue the baseball.

Fielder's Angles of Pursuit: “Jab Steps”:

The angle of pursuit to the batted ball is one of the most underutilized techniques that can be taught to really improve the fielder's ability to get to a batted baseball and improve overall team defense. To begin with the fielder must complete the ready position completely square to home plate from any position on the field. If a straight line were drawn from home plate to any fielder, he/she would be squared up when another line is drawn from of his feet to the other forming a perfect “T” with the home plate line as depicted in **Figure 2**. The directional line is different for each fielder as they are squared up to home plate in the ready position because his/her “T” has a unique angle to the plate depending on the position. Thus, a shortstop's angle will be significantly different from the almost perpendicular angle of that of the third baseman.

Figure 2. Proper Angles of Pursuit – Jab Steps





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After the ball is batted, the infielder's first step is a jab step, right or left, at a 45° from his/her "T". The 45° angle of pursuit differs greatly from position to position, based on the "T" formed in each position's respective ready position, and due to the depth of the position being played. For example, playing second base enables that fielder to increase his angle to the left (towards right field) because of the near proximity of the first baseman. The infielder may take up the "slack" or come back in from that angle once the velocity of the batted ball is calibrated, however if the first step is too shallow he/she can never make up the difference. Too often is the case where the fielder ends up chasing after the ball at an ineffective angle, resulting in not catching the ball or a poor throwing position. We call this errant route a curved or "banana" route.

Remember that the shortest distance between two points is always a straight line resulting in maximized efficiencies when fielding the batted ball. To make this point in a practice setting we measure out a string along a "banana" or curved route taken by an infielder and then we take that same length of string and show them the distance that they could have covered had they moved in a straight line, or we use that same string in a straight line to the position where they fielded the ball to show them the extra distance they had to cover to get to the same position. When shown how much shorter the straight line is, or how much more distance can be covered in a straight line, he/she comprehend the idea of why the correct angle of pursuit is necessary, and critical to playing the infield position. Taking the correct angle, using an effective jab step permits the fielder to track down balls he/she previously thought impossible, especially the closer the fielder is to home plate. The closer one plays to home plate, the more conscious he/she has to be of using the correct angle to a batted ball. The shorter distance between a fielder and batter, the less reaction time one has to get to a batted ball. Once again one can see that "time is out".

Mechanically when the fielder begins his pursuit of the ball, he uses a jab step, opening the hips at a 45° angle enabling correct ball pursuit. The jab step is taken right or left at the same angle with the lead foot and once the velocity of the batted ball is determined the angle can be further adjusted. A simple drill we have our infielders perform is to place each of them in the ready position at second base and have them take their jab step directly at the right field foul pole. Then we take them over to shortstop and have them work on their right foot jab steps directly at the left field foul pole.

In pursuit of the ball, the infielder should remember three important keys:

1. Begin the pursuit at a 45° angle
2. Move from the ready position, staying low not raising or lowering the hips from the starting position
3. Track the ball with the eyes completely to the point of contact running on the balls of the feet to prevent the head from moving up and down. While rolling balls or hitting fungo, coaches should not be able to see the eyes of the fielder at the moment of contact with the ball because the bill of the fielder's cap will have come down and covered the eyes. When we evaluate the infielder's position when performing these drills, we want to see the button on the top of the baseball cap.



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Basic Fielding Techniques:

First, and foremost, the fielder must achieve the correct ready position, balanced on the balls and inside of the feet. This allows movement in any lateral direction without a wasted motion. Be certain to achieve a jab step left or right at a 45° angle which will maximize the distance an infielder can cover. Remember a fielder can always take up the slack once the trajectory and velocity of the batted ball is determined. The fielder should line up the flight of the batted ball with his/her glove side foot even if the ball was hit opposite of glove side, making sure to **circle or get outside the baseball**. By fielding off to glove side foot, he/she can gain body momentum towards the direction of the target. If the ball is not fielded far enough to the glove side foot, fielding and throwing will be two separate and distinct motions. As the ball approaches, the fielder steps with his throwing side foot (left and forward) and then brings the glove side foot in a parallel line centering the ball just prior to contact. By moving to the side of the ball and moving in rhythm with the ball it is easier to visualize depth perception of the ball and achieve, or pick fielding the long or short hop.

Just prior to the ball arriving, the fielder extends his arms forward in front of his cap while still maintaining flexion in the elbow. This forms what we call the “fielding triangle” with glove acting as the apex of the triangle, while the feet form the two points of the triangles base as demonstrated in **Figure 3**. Hands should be positioned at 6 and 12 o’clock (“The Alligator”), being careful not to overextend the elbows nor stiffening the hands. The glove hand must be open, prepared to receive the baseball with the top (bare) hand in the 12 o’clock position protecting the face and capable of securing a bad hop.

Figure 3. Contacting the Baseball in a Fielding Triangle



Once the ball contacts the glove, the fielder should cradle the ball slightly toward his/her feet, approximately six inches. Once secured take the glove and ball directly to the armpit as



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illustrated in **Figure 4**, making sure to keep the glove hand inside the line of the body, rather than in a looping arc outside the body plane. Using the inside crow hop, advance the throwing side foot inside toward home-plate making sure to avoid a heel-click or outside crow hop, as depicted in the second photo in **Figure 4**. As the right foot is about to hit the ground, the fielder should be looking to pick-up the target. The arm should not reach beyond the armpit/shoulder and should be positioned approximately at an angle of 120° to that of the shoulder plane. Following release of the ball the infielder should follow the throw by walking several steps toward the target to aid with accuracy and compensate for arm strength. These throwing aspects are depicted in **Figure 5**. The entire step sequence is illustrated in **Figure 6**.

Figure 4. Loading the Fielded Ball to the Armpit followed by First Step in Front



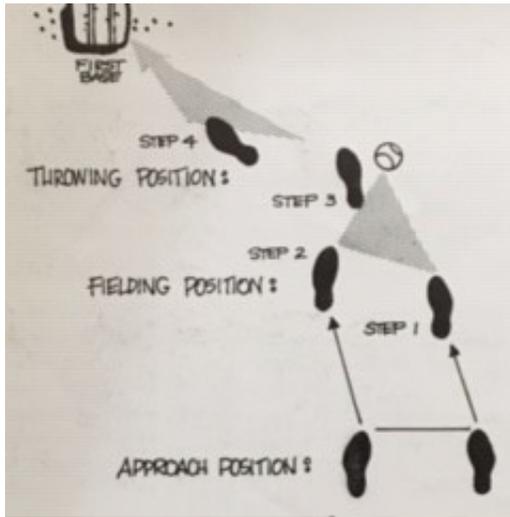
Figure 5. The Throw and Finish



Figure 6. Inside “Crow Hop” Step Sequence



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Basic Throwing Techniques:

One might think that throwing a baseball is rather simple. How difficult can it be to pick up a little round leather thing with stitched laces and whirl it rushing through the air at an intended target? Well, it's not so simple, if it were we wouldn't have the arm injuries that comes along with the sport. Aside from the overhand throwing motion flying in the face of biomechanics and human physiology, where you have three muscles to create the motion and only one to stop it. That right there is a disaster just waiting to happen. Thus, the criticality of proper and basic throwing technique should not be underestimated.

Let's first talk about grip, which will depend on the size of the player's hands. Infielders, outfielders, catchers and pitchers alike, at least to start with, should grab the baseball across the seams with what is known as a four-seam grip. This is illustrated in **Figure 7**. For smaller children this may require up to all four fingers, whereas eventually as the player grows the grip will only require two fingers. Such a grip maintains carry on the ball, or causes the baseball to spin backwards as it travels towards the target. This will allow for optimal consistent trajectory during flight.

Once the proper grip is achieved, the player should stand vertically with the glove side shoulder perpendicular to, and pointed, at the target. As depicted in **Figure 8**, the glove will then move away from the body towards the target forming what we call a "reverse or inverted C", creating a motion that pushes down and away from the body. The throwing arm will also move down and away from the body but in a "C" like motion away from the glove side.

Figure 7. Throwing Grip



Figure 8. Reverse or Inverted "C"



While the glove side points towards the target the throwing hand will reach back in the opposite direction making sure to rotate the wrist so that the baseball, and not the back of the hand, face directly behind or outward. We call the proper technique "feeding the apple", whereby the hand is closer to the head and the ball faces outward. The improper technique we call, "throwing the grenade", whereby the ball is closer to the head and the back of the hand faces outward. The



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proper and improper techniques are both illustrated in **Figure 9**. If the apple is fed backwards with the back of hand leading, a pair of teeth will no doubt leave their mark, whereas if we lead with the baseball or so called “apple”, all will be well.

Figure 9. Feeding the Apple vs. Throwing the Grenade



While we are drawing the arms apart the glove-side leg will step towards the target. The throwing arm will then make a circular motion while the shoulder rotates. At the same time, the glove will curl back in towards the arm pit optimizing torque. We call this the “YES” we just won the championship position, or the “Tiger Woods Fist Pump”. Finally, the throw is completed with the backside leg swiveling forward to become in line or parallel with the glove side foot. The curling of the glove to the armpit and the throwing finish are depicted in **Figure 10**. While performing these techniques the player’s eyes should focus on the target, which is the glove-side shoulder of your partner when playing basic catch. Encourage children to throw the ball above the waste and onto the glove-side.



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Figure 10. Glove Curl and Finish



Please note advanced throwing motions will be position specific and are discussed within the position specific fielding techniques. For example, when moving through the “reverse or inverted C”, and “C” like motions, outfielder and pitcher “Cs” will be much bigger or loopier to optimize power behind the throw, while catchers and infielders will be much shorter and stay nearly level with the torso to optimize quickness.

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